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ABSTRACT

Principals must have a clear sense of the mission of the school and a vision of what it can accomplish. They can be effective leaders by setting personal goals and regularly assessing personal achievements and by nuturing creativity in themselves and others. Personal qualities of effective leaders include the following: (1) self-management; (2) physical and emotional wellness; (3) time management; (4) professional growth; and (5) the highest standards of moral, ethical, and professional conduct. Professional qualities of effective leaders include the following: (1) exhibiting skill in written and oral communication and listening; (2) ensuring that educational opportunities are provided for all students and that all students are mastering essential skills and competencies; (3) involving school staff in decisions that affect their areas of expertise; (4) serving as instructional leader for the staff; (5) empowering staff to succeed by goal setting, inservice training, and providing appropriate information; and (6) enhancing the self-esteem of staff and students by demonstrating belief in their abilities, showing concern for their individual needs, and acknowledging their successes and accomplishments. Appended is a list of 36 suggested readings. (MLF)

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THE PRINCIPAL: RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CHANGE

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The Principal as Leader

Principals who serve as the leaders of schools will measure their success, to a large degree, by their skill in implementing basic principles of leadership. Leadership can be defined as the ability to envision ideals, to persuade others that the ideals are significant and attainable, and to develop strategies to move toward the ideals systematically and collaboratively.

Vision and Creativity in Leadership

Robert Kennedy once said that some people see things as they are and ask "why"? He dreamed of things that never were and asked "why not"? Effective leaders are able to creatively envision desirable outcomes for the future of their organizations and to develop creative and workable strategies for encouraging others to work with them to accomplish their vision. As Bennis and Nanus (1985) noted: "Leaders are the most results-oriented individuals in the world, and results get attention. Their visions or intentions are compelling and pull people toward them."[1]

Hickman and Silva (1984) define vision as "a mental journey from the known to the unknown, creating the future from a montage of current facts, hopes, dreams, dangers, and opportunities."[2] Given the widely documented need for reforms in public schools,[3] leaders who possess vision of this kind for their schools are essential.

The principal of a school must formulate a vision of what the school can accomplish--now and in the future. Such vision allows the principal to utilize those components of the existing structure of the school which are productive and positive. Needed changes and strategies for achieving the changes over time can be developed, and priorities can be focused on what is important and significant. While each principal will approach the task of creating a vision differently, the development of short and long term vision is essential to the success of the principal.

In order to be a visionary leader, the principal must have a clear sense of the mission of the school in general. Certainly, maximizing educational opportunities for all students must be a priority for all principals. Effective use of resources, efficient management, collaborative participation, and positive community relations are also goals to which the principal should aspire.

The principal brings his or her ideals to the specific school which he or she will lead. Careful, objective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school is an essential step in establishing a long term vision of what the ideals for that school may be. Analysis of the current status of the school in terms of student outcomes, personnel, structure and organization, utilization of resources, and community satisfaction provides the principal with vital information needed for the formulation of a vision about what the school can be. An important part of

this analysis involves talking with people in the school district to get personal impressions of the school from those who have experience with it.

Analysis requires assessment, objectivity, appraisal, and impartiality. The principal must be careful to guard against letting preconceived notions (his/her own or others) or past experiences unduly color his or her perceptions of the possibilities for the school.

Analysis will also determine the extent to which a workable vision is already in place in the school and assist the principal in determining how the vision can be productively built upon. By building on past achievements and successes in the school, the principal achieves greater support from staff, central office, and board members. Unnecessary duplication of previous efforts is also avoided.

The principal must have a sense of the future: what is important to move toward. What are the needs of the students in the school? How will changes in society impact on the school? What are the priorities necessary to make the school a viable, workable organization, now and in the future?

Visionary leaders are able to integrate their past knowledge, analysis of the current status of the school, and impressions of the future into an image of how the school can best carry out this mission. Visions, however, are of little use unless the principal can devise workable strategies to translate visions into a plan of action that

will inspire others to work towards the principal's vision. Time is of the essence in creating a vision about the school and beginning to translate the vision into action. Peters (1987) observes that "the organization is most malleable from day one; it becomes less so with each passing hour."[4] The successful principal, therefore, begins to formulate a vision for the school from the moment he or she is hired.

Creativity is an essential factor in formulating a vision for an organization, and for the development of strategies to encourage others to work with the principal. Creativity is also consistently needed to solve the on-going problems that confront a principal. Bouge (1985) describes the ideal school administrator as an artist: "The artist administrator is a thinking, searching, daring personality--an inventive and imaginative force in the lives of those about him, disturbing some and inspiring others."[5]

Since the creative process differs for individuals, effective principals are conscious of conditions and environmental factors which heighten their personal creativity. A variety of methods have been suggested to increase the creative power of leaders. Meditation and creative visualization work for some leaders. Others may be most creative while relaxing. An important factor in creativity appears to be openness--awareness of new ideas and the willingness to record and think about innovative ways of approaching problems.

Creativity is enhanced when the mind is allowed to brainstorm ideas without judgement. Too often, objections such as "it won't work" or "if I only had more resources" are introduced into the creative process too early, and good ideas are lost. An important step in the creative process, therefore, is to limit prior judgements, objections, and negative attitudes which may interfere with new ideas.

In addition to being creative themselves, successful leaders also utilize new ideas from those who work with them. Nuturing creativity in others involves encouragement, as well as knowing when to apply pressure and when not to apply pressure. Psychiatrist David Viscott (1985) notes: "Creative people demand alot of themselves and need sympathy. A little indulgence goes a long way to enhancing creative performance."[6]

Personal Qualities of Effective Leaders

Before leaders can effectively manage a complex organization, they must first learn to manage themselves effectively. Garfield (1986) comments: " . . . in every form of work, as opportunities expand and complexity increases, as the call for creative thinking and high performance becomes more insistent, the power of self-management emerges more and more dramatically."[7] Effective leaders manage themselves through personal goal setting and evaluation, and practicing physical and emotional wellness. They manage time effectively, grow

professionally and hold themselves accountable to the highest standards of ethical and moral conduct.

In addition to setting goals for their district and staff, effective principals set personal goals for their own achievement and regularly evaluate their progress towards those goals. Personal goal setting involves creating a personal vision of the future and holding oneself accountable for making regular progress towards that vision. Frequent evaluation of personal goals assures the principal that personal and professional growth are occurring and assists the principal in updating and changing goals as necessary. Self-awareness is enhanced by seeking the assessment of those the principal works with: teachers, classified personnel, and parents, as well as the assessment of those outside the working environment: family, friends, central office personnel, and other principals.

The effectiveness of a principal's leadership is enhanced or diminished by his or her physical and emotional wellness. Good physical health is an important attribute of a good administrator and care should be taken to protect that health. Some principals assert they are too "busy" to visit their physicians regularly and to take other protective measures to insure they are physically healthy. More realistically, such time is investment in the future of the principal and his or her potential usefulness to the profession.

Principals should practice good health habits. Getting the appropriate amount of sleep needed for personal effectiveness, eating wisely, and exercising regularly are now recognized as necessary parts of an effective leader's routine. The principal can appropriately expect those who work for him or her to limit their use of alcohol, tobacco, and prescription medicines and to eliminate the use of illegal drugs, and these standards must also apply to the principal.

The principal's emotional wellness is influenced by the degree of personal satisfaction found in his or her position. It is important for a leader to develop and maintain a realistic and objective focus on both perceived failures and perceived successes. Such focus helps the principal avoid becoming overly concerned about setbacks which may be of a temporary nature. Stagnation that comes from too much satisfaction with past successes may also be prevented.

Taking appropriate amounts of time for personal needs, relating to family and friends constructively, and pursuing personal interests outside the job also contribute to emotional wellness. Emotional wellness can produce greater job satisfaction, more considerate treatment of those the principal works with, and more productivity and achievement from the principal over longer periods of time. The administrator who manages his or her emotional wellness

appropriately is less likely to "burn out" and will be more likely to make a lasting contribution to the profession.

The principal's skill in time management will affect his or her physical and emotional wellness and is an important predictor of the leader's overall effectiveness. Good time management is the product of careful planning; therefore, one of the most important components in a time management plan is to make sure that time is available for uninterrupted planning and thinking to take place. Planning should involve realistic expectations for the amount of work that can reasonably be produced in a given time.

The principal should develop weekly and then daily plans for completing required events. Prioritizing tasks in their order of importance and working on the most important tasks first helps the principal assure that time is spent in a productive manner. Recognizing times of the day when he or she is most productive allows the principal to schedule the most important tasks for the most productive time periods.

The most carefully constructed plan for time management can fall victim to crisis and time wasting. While every leader will sometimes have to deal with unexpected crises, mimimizing crisis management is an important leadership priority. Often, crisis can be anticipated and dealt with before it becomes a major problem. Staff can assist the principal in this function if they are trained to anticipate and deal with problems before they become major and to keep

the principals well informed about problems which have the potential to become serious.

Time wasters, such as long visits, drawn-out written memorandums, and extended telephone calls, can also hamper the efficiency of the principal. Limiting the length and number of visits by sales personnel should be a goal of the principal. While the principal does want to be kept informed by staff, such visits should not be extended beyond their productive time--both the the staff member's time and that of the principal are then being used unproductively. The need to write memos may be reduced by telephoning in some instances, and telephone calls should be of reasonable length and limited, as appropriate, to a given time of the day.

Meetings can be major wasters of the principal's time. Unnecessary and poorly organized meetings also waste staff time and cause resentment. The principal should carefully consider the need for every planned meeting, and weigh the need for the meeting against the time of the personnel who will be involved. Carefully written memorandums may eliminate the need for certain meetings.

Appropriate meetings do provide an opportunity for principals to model the organizational and instructional skills they expect to see teachers use in the classroom. All meetings, therefore, should have a definite agenda, a specific time limit, and be well planned to productively utilize the time of those involved. The principal should

also seek to promote staff involvement during the meeting. The meeting should be summarized with checking to make certain the objectives of the meeting have been attained.

Principals must also learn to delegate appropriate tasks to staff members. Staff involvement builds ownership of projects and ideas and generates support for the principal. The administrator who feels pressured to do everything himself or herself is not making the most productive use of staff.

One of the most important members of the principal's staff is his or her secretary. The secretary should be trained to effectively support the principal by keeping track of appointments and commitments, keeping orderly and useful records, processing written information efficiently, and anticipating the principal's needs as much as possible. One of the secretary's most important tasks is to deal cordially and efficiently with members of the staff and with patrons, both in person and on the telephone.

The effective principal has a process for keeping track of needed data so that time is not wasted in searching for lost information or duplicating effort that has already been expended. The secretary can be of substantial assistance in helping to organize the principal's office, but the principal must also have a personal system for record keeping, collecting and retreiving data, and tracking the progress of projects underway in the school.

Principals should constantly be growing professionally and must, therefore, allot time for professional growth activities. Bennis and Nanus (1985) describe the importance of professional growth: "Learning is the essential fuel for the leader, the source of high-octane energy that keeps up the momentum by continually sparking new understanding, new ideas, and new challenges. It is absolutely indispensable under today's conditions of rapid change and complexity."[8]

Sources for professional growth include: reading professional journals and books, networking with other principals with similar interests, needs, and responsibilities, and attending conferences and workshops where new ideas are presented. As this paper demonstrates, many of concepts, strategies, and practices in the literature of business and management have direct application to the educational leader, and should be part of the principal's reading.

Finally, principals should embody the highest standards of moral, ethical, and professional conduct. The principal's actions have an impact on the climate and morale of the building and should serve as a positive model to those who work in the school. Bogue (1985) states: "Healthy or pathological, our values do indeed leave a mark. We are, willing or not, models to whom others look for operational definitions of values of means and values of ends."[9]

Those who employ and those who work for a principal can reasonably expect that the principal will bring honesty,

openness, fairness, and compassion to their position. Principals should strive to adhere to ethics and standards others may find cumbersome. The ethical and moral example of the superintendent should positively influence the attitudes and practices of teachers and other staff members, set the standard for policies and procedures of the school district, and encourage openness and cooperation in employee relations and the evaluation process.

The personal skills of principals reflect their ability to effectively manage themselves. These skills are a crucial part of the leader's overall effectiveness and a necessary preliminary to developing efficient and workable organizational practices.

Professional Qualities of Effective Leaders

In well managed schools, principals demonstrate skill in written and oral communcation and listening. Staff members, students, and patrons are dealt with equitably and their collaboration and participation in decisions affecting the school is encouraged. Meaningful evaluation of programs and personnel takes place regularly and results are utilized to make decisions for the school. The principal serves as instructional leader of the building and promotes good teaching. Finally, effective principals empower other to reach high levels of performance and enhance the self-esteem of those they work with.

Communication skills are vital to the success of a principal. Principals must provide necessary information to keep staff, students, parents, and patrons appropriately informed of decisions, policies, and procedures that affect them. Written communications also serve as a record of the school's accomplishments and document that needed information has been provided.

Written communications produced by the principal should be uniformly accurate and concise, as well as free of grammatical errors and misspellings. The writing should reflect the intended audience--it should not be written at a level above or below that of those who will read it. Graphics, printing, and paper quality should also be appropriate for the audience and purpose.

The principal's oral communication should be well organized, accurate, and free of jargon in making formal speeches to others. When responding to questions, care should be taken to think before speaking. Profanity should be avoided. Voice quality, tone, and rate of delivery should be appropriate for the audience and purpose.

While oral and written communication are important for the principal, perhaps the most vital communication skill to be developed is effective listening. According to Ray and Myers (1986), "To some extent it is true that you improve communication by improving your speech. But it is a far better thing to listen well than to speak, write, or even present ideas well."[10]

Effective listening involves opportunity and encouragement, as well as skill in listening to others. Opportunities to listen to others are increased when the principal is a frequent visitor throughout the school. By taking the time to visit classrooms and other areas in the school, the principal shows his or her interest in those who work for the school and offers them the opportunity to visit informally without making an appointment to see the principal. Informal assessment of instructional effectiveness can also take place during short classroom visits with less anxiety for effective teachers than longer, more formal visits can cause.

All those who work in the school should be encouraged to visit with the principal whenever they have an idea, concern, or comment. By accepting what the listener has to say without criticism or judgement, the principal increases the likelihood that a valuable idea will not be lost and that a small dissatisfaction will be expressed before becoming major. The principal should also encourage teachers to be accessible to students and parents and to be effective listeners.

Listening to others requires that the principal pay attention to the speaker. Nonverbal behaviors and verbal responses should convince the speaker that the administrator is interested in the message. The speaker should also be encouraged to elaborate and clarify their message when appropriate. Principals should have their listening skills

evaluated periodically by others and make necessary improvements. Effective listening takes time, but can pay big dividends for the principal.

Ethical, legal, and humanitarian considerations dictate that principals deal with their staff, students, and patrons equitably. For example, equitable leaders assure that employee hiring, retention, and promotion will be based on qualification and not on other considerations. Advantage will not be given on the basis of favoritism, ethnic background, sex, or other unjust considerations.

At the building level, the principal has the particular responsibility of assuring that educational opportunities are provided for all students and that all students are mastering essential skills and competencies. Effective schools research has shown that poor students, minority students, and students from broken homes are at risk for school failure. Therefore, the principal must be especially sensitive to the needs of such students and assure that the school promotes their success.

All members of the school staff, including classified personnel, should be appropriately involved in decisions which affect their areas of expertise. Decisions involving buildings and grounds would be made with input from custodians, for example. Decisions involving any kind of curriculum change should have input from teacher representatives.

Feedback and opinions from other sources may also be helpful. Students are the "consumers" of the school and can offer valuable input on curriculum, testing, quality, and personnel questions. Parents should be encouraged to give their opinions on school quality, curriculum sequence, and other issues which affect their students.

Business and industry can be consulted for input as to the quality of school graduates they employ and what future job skills may be needed. Patrons without students in school, who make up the majority of the population, should also be informed about the school. Patron support is essential in elections which affect issues in the school district.

An important responsibility of the principal is to facilitate on-going evaluation of the school's programs and to conduct meaningful evaluation of teacher effectiveness. Student outcomes are the most important factor to consider in such evaluation. Evaluation results must then be used to allocate personnel, financial resources, and time.

Test results and other data about student performance on essential skills and competencies must be regularly monitored and assessed to assure that all students are learning the minimum basic skills identified by the school district. As discussed, feedback from staff, students, and the publics of the school can provide valuable input about student learning, student self concept, and student enthusiasm for school. Specific goals and procedures for

remediating areas of weakness must be developed and monitored.

Effective schools research has concluded that the effectiveness of a school's instructional program will be determined in large measure by the effectiveness of the principal's instructional leadership of the school. As instructional leader, the principal has the responsibility for facilitating the improvement of teachers' instructional skills, insuring curriculum alignment, and making sure that all students have maximum opportunities to learn.

Instructional leadership requires the principal to function as master teacher in the school. The principal must be able to identify a variety of instructionally effective strategies and assist staff in appropriate implementation. Specific supervision skills are also required. These skills include the ability to build trust in the supervision and evaluation process, effective data collection during classroom observations, conferencing with the teacher, and assisting the teacher in setting appropriate goals for improvement. [11]

As instructional leader, the principal serves as a model for staff. For example, staff meetings provide the principal with the opportunity to model instructional skills that are desirable for teachers. Instructional conferences with teachers which follow the principal's classroom observation visits require skill in planning, selecting appropriate strategies for presentation, communication, and

checking for understanding--competencies which are also required of the classroom teacher.

As leader, the principal has the capacity to empower those who work in the school to achieve the highest levels of performance possible. As Bennis and Nanus (1985) note: "The great leader, like the great orchestra conductor, calls forth the best that is in the organization. Each performance is a learning experience which enables the next undertaking to that much more effective . . ."[12]

Empowerment is facilitated when goals are carefully set and monitored and when employees can see how their efforts benefit the organization. To empower teachers, principals must be willing to share decision making responsibilities and to implement programs which facilitate collegiality and peer involvement in instructional improvement. Inservice training also promotes improvement of teaching skills.

Principals must also facilitate an on-going program of iservice training for other employees in the school. As employees improve their skills and gain competency in the skills their jobs require, performance and morale increase.

Information is also a factor in empowerment. Employees must feel that they have access to information about their job, results of their performance, student outcomes, and other factors which concern them. Such information is especially important when a change, such as a school closing or reduction in force, is anticipated. Anxiety lessens as

employees feel they are well informed and the organization cares about them.

Finally, effective leaders recognize the importance of building the self-esteem of those who work in the organization. As teachers and other school employees are empowered, self-esteem grows. This result is important, because those working with students are more likely to foster positive self-concept in students if their own self-esteem is high.

By allowing teachers to participate in appropriate decision making processes, principals demonstrate that they believe in the abilities of those who work for them. Showing consideration by indicating personal interest in teachers and other employees, remembering special occasions, and expressing concern in times of difficulty also enhance employee self-esteem.

Recognition of both minor and major accomplishments of teachers and other employees increases self-esteem. A regular program of recognition for students in the school should also be facilitated by the principal at the school level and encouraged in each classroom.

Basic professional skills required of every principal include communication, equitable treatment, shared decision making, evaluation, instructional leadership, empowerment, and enhancement of employee self esteem. Hickman and Silva (1984) also cite the importance of patience, which allows

the leader to employ other skills appropriately with ". . . exquisite timing, a key ingredient in lasting excellence."[13]

Summary

Effective principals lead by:

--envisioning ideals for the school and creatively developing strategies to work towards these ideals and solve problems

--setting personal goals and regularly assessing personal achievements

--working to maintain their physical and emotional wellness

--establishing a personal schedule that maximizes the leader's effectiveness

--regularly participating in professional growth activities

--demonstrating the highest standards of moral, ethical, and professional conduct which serve as a model for those he/she leads and builds trust in the leader

--exchanging ideas with others through the use of effective communication skills, especially listening

--equitably dealing with all concerned with the school, assuring that all are treated fairly and that all students have maximum opportunities to learn

--encouraging collaboration and participation from everyone in the school, including students

--facilitating evaluation of the outcomes of the school to assure that students are learning and that district goals are being achieved

--providing instructional leadership for the school

--empowering staff to succeed by goal setting, inservice training, and providing appropriate information

--enhancing the self-esteem of those he/she leads by demonstrating belief in their abilities, showing concern for their individual needs, and acknowledging their successes and accomplishments

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